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SOME IN HOUSE SEEK AUTHORITY TO APPROVE COVERT OPERATIONS

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WASHINGTON - DEMOCRATIC MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE ARE CONSIDERING A PROPOSAL TO CREATE A COMMISSION THAT WOULD SET GUIDELINES FOR, AND APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE, ALL COVERT INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES BY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

UNDER THE PROPOSAL, COMMISSION MEMBERS WOULD BE APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE LEADERS OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE.

THE PROPOSAL IS PART OF THE COMMITTEE'S SEARCH FOR A SOLUTION TO THE DISPUTE OVER THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S COVERT AID TO NICARAGUAN REBELS. IT ALSO REFLECTS CONGRESSIONAL CONCERNS OVER THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANY ABRUPT TERMINATION OF SUCH AID.

"I DON'T THINK THAT A COMMISSION IS THE ANSWER TO EVERY PROBLEM," SAID REP. CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI, D-WIS., THE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN. "BUT IN THIS CASE IT'S SOMETHING WE'RE THINKING ABOUT."

ZABLOCKI SAID THAT THE PROPOSAL, MADE BY COMMITTEE AIDES EARLIER THIS WEEK, WAS ONE OF SEVERAL UNDER CONSIDERATION. HE DECLINED TO DISCUSS THE OTHER PROPOSALS.

CREATION OF A COMMISSION WOULD MARK A MAJOR DEPARTURE FROM CURRENT PRACTICE AND WOULD CONSTITUTE THE FIRST TIME THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH AGREED TO SHARE WITH CONGRESS THE RIGHT TO APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE PLANS FOR COVERT OPERATIONS. UNDER PRESENT LAW, THE ADMINISTRATION IS REQUIRED ONLY TO INFORM THE HOUSE AND SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEES OF SPECIFIC COVERT OPERATIONS. BUT CONGRESS ALSO ENJOYS THE POWER OF THE PURSE, WHICH SOME MEMBERS SEEK TO INVOKE TO END COVERT AID TO THE NICARAGUA REBELS.

IN ADDITION, THE SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE THIS MONTH ASSERTED ITS RIGHT TO APPROVE SPECIFIC COVERT OPERATIONS. THESE EFFORTS APPARENTLY REFLECT THE DETERMINATION OF CONGRESS TO PLAY A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN THE APPROVAL AND CONDUCT OF COVERT OPERATIONS. AT THE SAME TIME, MOST MEMBERS OF CONGRESS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT COVERT OPERATIONS AUGMENT FOREIGN POLICY, FOR WHICH THE PRESIDENT HAS MAJOR AUTHORITY.

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